



THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

End of the Age Series
VOLUME VII

Gordon Lindsay

The Judgment Seat of Christ

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by Gordon Lindsay

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Introduction

One of the most solemn subjects of the Bible concerns the Judgment Seat of Christ before which all believers shall some day stand. How will the saints be judged? What laws will be used as the guide? When and why will this judgment take place?

These are just a few of the many questions answered by Gordon Lindsay in these pages. Lindsay was recognized as one of the greatest teachers on eschatology—the study of the hidden future.

The Bible many times speaks of an eternal reward for the faithful. Any system of merit and rewards will inevitably demand a payday someday. Everyone who works for the Master here will at that time receive wages. Such a prophecy is not at all mere fancy but is a literal Bible fact.

—Bob Summers, Editor
Christ For The Nations

Chapter I

The Judgment Seat of Christ

“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God” (Romans 14:10-12).

One of the most solemn subjects of the Bible concerns the Judgment Seat of Christ before which all believers shall some day stand. The Judgment Seat of Christ is not to be confused with the Great White Throne Judgment, at which time the wicked dead, small and great, shall appear before God and answer for their deeds. Their fate is awesome indeed. Alas, each day draws the careless sinner that much nearer that dread hour. Multitudes quite unconcerned let the precious hours slip by, though at each passing second they are one heartbeat nearer to sealing their doom for eternity.

Different indeed is the destiny of the lowliest believer. Christ in His mercy has taken the penitent's place and atoned for his transgressions. The justified sinner will never stand at the White Throne Judgment, nor will his sins be brought to remembrance! They are gone forever, for God has blotted them out, and the man is a new creature and will stand justified even as one who has never sinned.

Nevertheless, each of us must give an account of his works at the Judgment Seat of Christ. There, each deed will be tested by fire to discover whether it be of silver, gold, and precious stones; or of wood, hay, and stubble to be burned up in the fires of judgment.

Order of Judgment

The Judgment Seat of Christ

This great tribunal is called the Judgment Seat of Christ because all judgment has been delivered to the Son. “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22).

Nevertheless, Christ’s judgment is not an arbitrary one. A just judge does not make decisions on the basis of his personal feelings, but rather upon the law of the land. So Christ will not personally judge those who stand before Him either at the Judgment Seat or later at the Great White Throne. The words that He spoke while on earth will judge them.

“And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:47-48).

For this reason it behooves every believer to study carefully Christ’s words and shape his life according to them. When Jesus concluded His Sermon on the Mount He likened those who obeyed His words to a wise man who built on the rock:

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock” (Matt. 7:24-25).

The Time of the Judgment of Rewards

When will this judgment of rewards take place? Is it at death? At the rapture? At the tribulation harvest? Actually it is not at any of these times. We are told in Revelation 11:15-18 that it will take place after the seventh trumpet sounds or at the close of the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord.

“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders,

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which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth” (Rev. 11:15-18).

We see from this passage of Scripture that the rewards are not given out immediately when the saints come into the presence of the Lord. We know that none of the Church will be on earth during the Day of the Lord when the trumpet judgments and the wrath of God are being poured out. *Yet we are specifically told that the rewards are not given to the saints and the prophets until after the seventh trumpet has been sounded.* So it is clear that there is an interval between the translation of the saints and the Judgment Seat of Christ. Actually the text indicates that this event is contemporary with the closing judgments of the Day of the Lord. At this time the saints will be assigned their positions in the kingdom, and they will assume their places of authority in the Millennial government which will now be set up.

The Convocation of the Saints of All Ages

What a meeting this will be—a convocation of the saints of all ages! We are given a hint of this in Hebrews 12:22-24. This vast assemblage will include Christ. His Bride, the saved of all ages, both of the Old Testament and the New Testament ages.

“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Hebrews 12:22-24).

The above text speaks of the city of God which includes an innumerable company of angels, the church of the firstborn and the spirits of just men made perfect. The latter undoubtedly has reference to the Old Testament saints. In the previous chapter the apostle in speaking of these saints says, "God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:40).

The initiation of this convocation is referred to in Revelation 19 in which we are told that all Heaven resounds with the praises and hallelujahs of the saints and all the inhabitants of heaven. At this time also the marriage of the Lamb takes place (Rev. 19:7-10).

Following the events of this great hour, the Judgment Seat of Christ is set, and all saints will appear before this bar to receive according to the things done in the body:

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10).

The Believers' Sins Already Judged

We have mentioned that this judgment is not a judgment of the believers' sins. They have already been judged. Of this the writer of Hebrews declares, "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:17). Ezekiel 33:16 says that "none of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him." We cannot overemphasize this glorious truth. In Peter's second sermon after Pentecost he tells the people to "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). In conversion man is born again; a second chance, as it were, is being given to the sinner to blot out his past! He may, therefore, *stand before God as if he had never sinned!* This is the great miracle of grace. How often have saints regretted their old sins and wished a thousand times that they had never committed them. But let them rejoice, for by means of the blood of Christ, man's sins are not only forgiven, but they are blotted

out! Thus Paul could say, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Cor. 5:17). The Judgment Seat of Christ is not a judgment of the believer’s sins but of his works. The judgment of his sins already took place on the cross at the time of Christ’s death, when God made Him to become sin for us (II Cor. 5:21). Of this judgment the apostle writes to Timothy: “Some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after” (I Tim. 5:24).

This being the case, it is exceedingly important to make a distinction between salvation, which is a free gift of God through Christ, and rewards which are earned by God’s people.

A Distinction Between Rewards for Faithful Service and Salvation Which is a Free Gift

Rewards are given for faithful service, whereas salvation is always referred to as a free gift. Thus Jesus speaking to the woman at the well mentioned the water of life that He would give as the gift of God:

“Jesus answered and said unto her, *If thou knewest the gift of God*, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water ... But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:10, 14).

Again the apostle Paul speaks of the wages of sin as being death. Man by his evil works brings forth death, but the offer of life comes not by works, but is the gift of God:

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Still again in Ephesians 2:8-9 the apostle shows that salvation is entirely through faith and not of works:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of

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yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephes. 2:8-9).

Rewards on the other hand are earned as a result of faithful service. Paul refers to the crown of righteousness that he will receive as the reward for his good fight (II Tim. 4:7-8). Nothing done in the name of Jesus and for His cause will be overlooked. Even so small an act of giving a cup of cold water to one of God’s least saints will not be left out of the account:

“And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward” (Matt. 10:42).

Yet, rewards are not to be measured on the basis of the amount of the zeal. The motives behind those works play a most important part in measuring the reward.

Chapter II

The Judgment of Rewards

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (II Tim. 4:7-8).

The work of the apostle Paul was completed. He had fought a good fight, and the time of his warfare was finished. The executioner was at the door to carry out the command of Nero. But another door was about to be opened to him, the door to glory. A crown of righteousness awaited him, but as he said, “not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

Paul had gone through many severe trials. A list of his persecutions is found in II Corinthians 11. No one enjoys persecution. A normal person naturally wants to be well thought of by his fellows. The temptation is, therefore, to take the easy way and conform to the spirit of the world; for the children of the world do not like people who are different from them, and they are prone to make life unpleasant for those who do not agree to their way of living. In fact, the conduct of the righteous is a rebuke to the sinner and makes him feel uneasy.

The Reward of Those Who Are Persecuted for Righteousness

So we are told that they who will live godly will suffer persecution. Some people who are especially sensitive suffer deeply. Jesus took note of this in His Sermon on the Mount and encouraged those who went through such trials, promising these who stood true, a great reward in heaven!

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’

sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:10-12).

The apostles understood the meaning of this promise, and on one occasion after they had been beaten by the officers of the Sanhedrin for preaching in the name of Jesus they departed "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41).

The Reward of the Soul Winner

Daniel was not only a great man of faith, but he was a soul-winner. Through his testimony, the most powerful man on earth, Nebuchadnezzar, repented and acknowledged the God of Israel (Dan. 4:34-37).

We are told of the prophet's great intercessory prayer in Daniel 10 and how after three weeks of delay the angel came with the answer. The angelic messenger told Daniel many things that would occur at the time of the end. The high point of his revelation was the glorious truth of the resurrection and the reward of those who turn many to righteousness:

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12:2-3).

The comparison of the soul-winner to the "stars" of heaven is a beautiful one. Only in recent years have we begun to understand the immensity of the universe, the vastness of the distance between the stars, and the incredible size of these celestial bodies.

We are informed by astronomers that the distance to the nearest star is over four light years away. Light traveling at the

rate of 186,000 miles a second requires four years to travel the 26 trillion miles. But this star is a near neighbor indeed. Many others are hundreds, even tens of thousands of light years distant. Our own Milky Way with a population of 100 billion stars is some 100,000 light years in diameter, but it is only one of many other millions of similar galaxies at distances of millions of light years.

As we consider these things, we begin to see the significance of the verse, "They that turn many to righteousness (shall shine) as the stars forever and ever."

Apart from the "winning of Christ," the great reward of the Christian lies in the winning of souls. The joy of winning men to righteousness was the great incentive and motivation that caused Christ to endure the agony of the cross, and we are admonished to emulate Him by laying aside every weight to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).

Jesus tasted the joy of winning a sin-laden soul at the well of Samaria. To this poor woman who came with her pitcher He said, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). Jesus revealed Himself to her as the Messiah (Verses 25-26), and she not only believed but led others to the Saviour (Verses 29, 39, 42). Later when the disciples urged Him to eat, His cryptic reply was, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of."

The world has many things that are given a high value. Precious gems are reckoned in terms of up to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Works of art change hands at prices in the millions. Men of wealth not knowing how to spend their riches purchase antiques and rare works at fabulous prices. But all in their time turn to dust or are lost. Only one thing in this world has an enduring value—the human soul. Jesus compared its worth to be more than the whole world. Thus did He speak to His disciples:

"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in

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exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his work" (Matt. 16:26-27).

If one man's soul is worth more than the world, then what should Christians strive for more than anything else? Clearly the answer is: to win souls. When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, He will bring His saints with Him (Jude 14-15), as well as the angels, and He shall reward "every man" according to his work (Rev. 22:12). And one of the rewards will be the joy of meeting the souls won by our labors for Christ (Luke 16:9).

The Reward of the Intercessor

It would be a serious omission while considering the subject of the Judgment Seat of Christ and the rewards thereof without including in our study the ministry of prayer and intercession. Laymen are apt to think that the major rewards will go principally to famous evangelists and specially gifted ministers. This, however, is a mistake. Indeed, for those engaged in a large public ministry there are traps and pitfalls along the way that have ensnared many an unwary minister. Men of God who are particularly gifted and whose ministry has a wide appeal become the principal target of the onslaughts of Satan. Many a promising minister has been caught in the snares of the enemy and stumbled and fallen. Men upon whom great responsibility falls are particularly dependent upon those who stand behind them in prayer. While the prayer warrior is not in the public eye, he performs a most important function in the Body of Christ. Those who faithfully carry on this ministry are assured of a full reward.

There is a beautiful illustration in I Samuel in which David laid down the principle that "as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike" (I Sam. 30:24). In other words, those who stayed behind to keep the home fires burning were to share alike with those who were in the forefront of the battle. Spiritually speaking, they who stand behind those who meet the public are in the heat of the battle as much as they are; for there is a

constant spiritual battle going on in heavenly places:

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephes. 6:12).

The Importance of the Intercessor

Abraham is reckoned as the father of the faithful. He was faithful in his own house. In speaking of Abraham the Lord said:

“Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do ... For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment ...” (Gen. 18:17, 19).

Abraham is revealed as an intercessor in the famous passage of Genesis 18:23-33. Although he could not save Sodom because of its wickedness, he prevailed to save the family of Lot. Abraham’s prayers and faithfulness have had an effect upon all the generations since. God said, “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen. 22:18). Abraham’s name is mentioned first of those who shall participate in the coming Millennium when the kingdom of God is revealed on earth (Luke 13:27-28).

After Israel had sinned by worshipping the golden calf and had become liable to divine judgment, Moses stood between the living and the dead, and in a self-effacing intercession saved the nation from destruction:

“And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them” (Exod. 32:31-

34).

Daniel was another intercessor; and as the result of his prayers he received the marvelous revelations of the coming of the Messiah and of many significant events of the future, down to the very end of the age, at which time he was told that his people should experience a period of trouble unprecedented, but that they should be saved out of it (Jer. 31:7; Dan. 12:1). Daniel himself was given a promise of his lot at the end time. "But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days" (Dan. 12:13).

The Reward of the Giver

Not everyone is called to be a minister or a missionary, but all are called to stand behind this ministry. There is a ministry of giving, and great is the reward of those who are faithful to their trust.

Whether we give of our labor, of our finances, or labor in prayer, the law of the kingdom in the spiritual realm is governed by the same inevitable laws as in the natural realm. A farmer who sows sparingly or lets his land lie fallow is going to reap sparingly, but he who sows abundantly will reap proportionately. Paul likens the case of the farmer to our sowing in the spiritual realm. He admonished the people to whom he ministered, that when he came to them, and the call for contributions was made they should not be unprepared. Rather, they should lay up beforehand so that they might be ready. Then he gave them the illustration of those who sow bountifully and of those who sow sparingly. They shall reap in the same proportion:

"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:6-7).

The amount of the gift is only one element of giving. That is

a factor, for God does give some men and women a special ministry of giving (Rom. 12:6-8). This is just as genuine a ministry as prophesying, teaching, exhorting, or ruling. Experience shows that he who is made steward of much and succeeds in fulfilling his responsibility faithfully needs unusual grace and wisdom. He must not be moved merely by his emotions, but his giving must be guided with thoughtfulness and with understanding.

But there is another factor involved in giving. Some of God's people are poor. Therefore, what they have left after they have given is also considered in God's reckoning as was shown by Christ's words concerning the widow that gave two mites. He said, "This poor widow hast cast in more than they all,"—more than all of the rich men who were casting their gifts into the treasury (Luke 21:1-4).

There is still a third factor involved which we have mentioned already—giving cheerfully and with joy. "God loveth a cheerful giver." He who gives of necessity will not receive the same reward as he who gives cheerfully.

There is a story of a Scottish man who was a regular church goer, but was exceedingly close in his giving. Usually his offering to the Lord was a two-pence, and rarely indeed did a six-pence find its way into the church offering. Once, however, by mistake he gave a guinea. When the error was discovered, he was sorely disturbed and asked the deacon if he could have the matter corrected and his guinea returned. The deacon informed him that a gift once given to the Lord could not be taken back. Resigned to his loss he comforted himself saying, "Well, the Lord will reward me for the guinea." "Not so," the deacon replied. "You intended to give a two-pence, and so that is all the Lord counts you have given!"

The story is probably apocryphal, but it illustrates a truth. The attitude of our heart has much to do with the reward we shall receive for our giving at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Lord solemnly admonished us to lay up treasures in heaven where moth doth not corrupt and where thieves do not

break through and steal:

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:19-21).

While we are on the subject, there is a matter which many good Christians overlook, although they are devoted believers in Christ and are very faithful in their regular giving to God’s work—too often what they leave behind when they depart this life does not go for the cause of Christ. Of course they have a duty to those who may be dependent on them. Parents owe something to the children, even as the Bible teaches. Nevertheless, in many cases people could also leave a substantial part to God’s work, if they handled their affairs wisely. They could transfer their possessions into heavenly currency—treasures in heaven that they could enjoy for eternity. But alas, mainly through neglect or postponement of duty until it is too late, they fail to do so. They have eternity to regret their failure.

Some are faithful givers in their lifetime, but make no provision for handling their estate properly upon leaving this world, superstitiously supposing that the making of a will or a trust would hasten death. The state then after their demise, in effect, makes a will for them with stipulations which they probably had not intended. Often ungodly relatives fall heir to their hard-earned money and run through it in a short time for their own selfish purposes.

How often have we known of people of wealth who have declared their purpose to do something substantial for God’s work; instead they dillydallied in the meantime using their money for investments that too often turned out poorly. In the end they departed this life having lost all of this world’s goods and had nothing to show for them in the world to come.

And yet for many people wills are not the best way to transfer their worldly goods:

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“And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations” (Luke 16:9).

Chapter III

Wood, Hay and Stubble

“Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble ... If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (I Cor. 3:12, 15).

In the discussion of rewards, there is another side of the picture which we may not omit. It is true that Christ will reward every man according to his works; alas, the works of some will not stand the test! They will be burned up as wood, hay, and stubble in the searching fires of that great day; for not only the work but the motives behind it must be tested on that day.

For example, it might be thought that a man who gives all his goods to feed the poor must surely rank at the top of the list, but Paul speaking on the subject says, “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor ... and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (I Cor. 13:3). In other words, our giving must be motivated first by our devotion to God and also by our love for His people. If it is done merely to receive the praise of men, then there will be no reward in the day of Christ. Thus Jesus said, “But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thy alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:3-4).

This means that if one would receive a reward from the Heavenly Father, his gift should be unto the Lord and not to be seen of men. For if it is done solely from that motive the gift becomes wood, hay, and stubble. We are not to be ostentatious in our giving, although of course this does not mean that we must go out of our way to hide our giving. It is even possible to be proud of the way we give.

That which is done in the spirit of compassion for the less

fortunate and the underprivileged of this world is specifically mentioned by the Lord to receive a reward at the “resurrection of the just.”

“And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14).

Giving for the love of Christ and His people indeed has a reward. Jesus told the rich young ruler that if he gave his goods to the poor and would follow Him, he would have treasure in heaven:

“Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me” (Luke 18:22).

Alas, the young man could not quite make up his mind to do that, for we are told he had great possessions.

Martyrdom and Its Reward

The Scriptures speak on various occasions that the Lord has reserved a special reward for those who suffer martyrdom. Jesus said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). To the church at Smyrna, He gave a promise saying, “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer ... be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

According to the records of the early church fathers, most of the apostles gave their lives for the cause they believed in. Jesus indicated that His disciple Peter would follow Him in laying down his life (John 21:19). Stephen, the first martyr of the church, at his death beheld Christ standing at the right hand of God. James, the brother of John, was slain by the sword of Herod. The apostle Paul foresaw his own departure by martyrdom (II Tim. 4:6-8).

The book of Hebrews lists the great heroes of faith in the

eleventh chapter. Of some it says: “Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection ... (of whom the world was not worthy)” (Heb. 11:35, 38).

Thus we see what great honor God bestows upon those who give their lives for His cause. They obtain “a better resurrection.” Death is man’s enemy, and we instinctively shrink from it. Therefore, those who for Christ’s sake lay down their lives are accorded worthiness of special honor and reward. Of such Jesus said, “And whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matt. 16:25).

Nevertheless, martyrdom for the sake of martyrdom has no virtue. We hear of Buddhists in Vietnam who in their zeal and fanatical desire for a brief moment of glory immolate themselves in a foolish protest against their government. Such acts, of course, are madness; some people are so insane in their reasoning that they endure incredible suffering and pain for which nothing is accomplished but their own hasty demise. Their act instead of being inspired by love may be motivated by the opposite—hatred. So martyrdom for its own sake gains nothing. It is as Paul said, “And though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (I Cor. 13:3).

Wood, Hay, and Stubble—The Dangers of the Tongue

Let us consider the losses a man may sustain by his careless use of the tongue. Not many people realize that every word they speak is being recorded. Though it may have seemed incredible in times past, we who live in this electronic age understand how easy it is to record one’s words and be able to play them again exactly as they were spoken. Our words will be a most important factor in determining our lot at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

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For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37).

“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matt. 7:1-2).

We see, therefore, that we shall be judged not only by our deeds, but by our words and by the manner in which we have judged others. Therefore, if we are harsh or unnecessarily critical in our judgment of others, we may be assured that we will be judged in the same measure. If we make no allowances for the frailties of others, no allowances will be made for us. All of us should learn to show charity for the shortcomings of others, if we ourselves are to obtain mercy.

It is evident that many people while they are busy laying up a good recompense of reward on one hand are at the same time wasting it by the careless use of the tongue. How many professing Christians spend much of their time in spiteful conversation concerning others; or motivated by jealousy, they engage in malicious gossiping or backbiting. The unexpressed thought seems to be that in tearing down others they are building themselves up. But actually they are doing the opposite.

James 3 gives a solemn warning in his dissertation on the tongue. The apostle says a perfect man is he who does not offend in word. He adds that a tongue is like a rudder on a ship. As a small helm can turn about a great ship, so likewise “the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things” (Verse 5). It can defile the whole body “and is set on fire of hell” (Verse 6). Strong words indeed!

In the description of the firstfruits of the redeemed referred to in Revelation 14:1-5, we are told of those who “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” that “in their mouth was found no guile; for they are without fault before the throne of God.” Many things might have been said about this choice company of saints, but in those brief verses, the mastery of their tongue was of such importance that it was mentioned.

We cannot elaborate on this subject further except to repeat that the issue as it affects us at the Judgment Seat of Christ will depend largely on our choice of words. Let us choose them carefully, therefore, lest we fritter away unwittingly the reward that would otherwise be ours.

Craftiness and Hypocrisy of Professing Christians

Likewise were Ananias and Sapphira favored. As charter members in the new church, they held an honored position. But their covetousness overruled all considerations, and for the sake of a little mammon they blotted from their minds the thought that God must see each move they made. So the two of them hastened to a dishonored grave (Acts 5:1-11).

Their counterpart is found in not a few cases today. Men whom we never would have thought of as being classified with Ananias and Sapphira have actually embezzled church funds. Still others who profess to be Christians, instead of paying their honest debts, have squandered the money of those who trusted them in a shameful way. We have known of some who have professed to be ministers of the Gospel but who have gone to elderly women and managed by falsehood and deceit to borrow money from them without any thought of repaying it. Though these men have been at one time used of God in the ministry, alas by their crooked actions they have thrown away their reward, if not their souls. For of all those Jesus rebuked in His day, He most scathingly denounced the hypocrite.

Too often laymen and sometimes ministers, upon witnessing the prosperity of others and believing that they have as much right to such material blessings, have resorted to all sorts of questionable schemes to accomplish their end. Often they overlook the fact that the person they envy has gone through years of tests, trials, and toil before they enjoyed their present prosperity. But they wanted a shortcut and were not careful of what method they employed to attain their purpose. Often they were denied enjoyment of their ill-gotten gains, not to speak of

their eternal loss.

There are Christians who will not commit dishonest acts, but they can fall for more subtle temptations. There are men who would not default an open business debt, but after having obtained great prosperity through the generosity of others, they utterly forget their benefactors and even deny the benefit they received. Intoxicated with their own importance, they rationalize their conduct and divest themselves of any sense of gratefulness. Though God seems to bless their efforts, nevertheless, in the Day of Christ, much of the reward that they thought they earned will be found to be wood, hay, and stubble consumed by the fires of that day.

Wood, Hay and Stubble—The Cult Obsession

“And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us” (Luke 9:49-50).

John saw a man casting out devils in the name of Jesus, and it displeased him. That the afflicted were being delivered from the power of Satan impressed him not at all. That the worker did not submit to his authority troubled John a great deal. For this reason he forbade the man to continue his ministry because he refused to carry his credentials. Now admittedly as one of the Twelve, John had very good credentials indeed, and it would seem that the man would have done well to have accepted John's invitation to follow him. Nevertheless, when John presented his complaint to Jesus, he received instead of commendation a sharp rebuke!

Carnal nature ever grasps for more and more power. This has always been true. John learned his lesson, but many in positions of authority since his time have not. Ever and again we see the sectarian spirit rise up with its preposterous claims. Jesus said that the scribes and Pharisees compassed land and sea to make one proselyte and when they succeeded, the victim of their wiles became a twofold child of hell. The leaders of cults

invariably employ some doctrinal gimmick in their effort to insulate their followers from further contact with the Body of Christ. Their claims are often arrogant and even insolent in their branding of all others as false teachers. Too often they succeed in putting their victims under a fearful bondage.

Jesus prayed that His people might be one (John 17:21). Therefore, they who seek to divide the Body of Christ will have as their reward wood, hay, and stubble; and those who follow after them allowing themselves to be brought into bondage will at the Judgment Seat of Christ share in their bitter disappointment.

Wood, Hay, and Stubble—The Messianic Complex

“A certain man, called Simon ... bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God” (Acts 8:9-10).

Simon is said to have believed Philip’s preaching concerning Christ and was baptized. He thus was identified as a believer in Christ. Simon’s ambition, however, was to be known as a great one, a man to head a great movement. According to church history, Simon did this very thing and became the leader and father of gnosticism.

Human ambition when it gets the ascendancy is a dangerous thing indeed. We have known men who have accomplished great good for the cause of Christ, and if they had been content they stood to have earned great recompense of reward on the Day of Christ. But they were not satisfied. Ambition gnawed until it overcame them and ultimately caused change in their personality. Unsanctified ambition was the thing that cursed Satan and resulted in his downfall. It is a dangerous thing when a man begins to consider himself as “the man of the hour” or “God’s man for this generation.” John the Baptist, greatest of men born of women in his day confessed that he was only a

voice crying in the wilderness.

We have watched men who have enjoyed a mighty ministry and have proved a blessing to the multitudes. Then we have seen a gradual change in their attitude. Once they were humble, but now they become obsessed with their own importance. They became the victims of a “messianic complex.”

Alas, unless they quickly recognize the source of these impressions as being Satanic, a terrible awakening awaits them and a loss of all reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The warning that Jesus gave on this cannot be misinterpreted. “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matt. 23:12).

That Your Fruit Should Remain

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you” (John 15:16).

There remains one thing more to say on this subject. Jesus said that He chose His disciples that they might “bring forth fruit, and that (their) fruit should remain.” He thus showed that to bring forth fruit is one thing and that for it to remain is another. Significantly, He indicated that prevailing prayer in His name would cause the fruit to remain.

Unfortunately, here is a dreadful mistake that is often made. The Word is preached, souls are saved; but converts are left to become victims of the enemy. Every soul-winner must give careful and prayerful attention to preserving his converts. If he leaves them to shift for themselves, Satan is sure to attack them, and the fruit is too often lost. And if it is lost, the result is tantamount to wood, hay, and stubble. The reward is lost.

It is sad indeed to see some ministers who had put forth great efforts to win the lost to Christ, undo all the good they have done, because of their careless living and unchristian conduct. Alas, on that great day they shall see that their works

Wood, Hay and Stubble

have brought forth no ripened fruit. The labor of a lifetime has become wood, hay, and stubble.

Chapter IV

Rewards as Taught in the Parables

When Jesus departed out of the city of Jericho for His final entry into Jerusalem, His followers were ready to acclaim Him king. Indeed, as they entered Jerusalem they would shortly be crying, “Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest” (Luke 19:38). The Lord felt it necessary to disabuse the minds of the people of the delusion that the kingdom of God was about to appear. In order to correct this misapprehension, He told them the Parable of the Pounds. This parable assured them that the kingdom of God would come, but the time was not yet.

The parable spoke of a certain nobleman who went into a far country to receive a kingdom, thus indicating that he would be gone for a long time. He gave to each of his servants a pound of money. The parable further depicts the nobleman, after a long time, returning, upon which he called together his servants to learn how they had prospered in their trading. Each reckoned their gains, some more, some less; and each was given a reward for faithful service. But one man had taken his pound and wrapped it in a napkin. This servant was punished for his slothfulness.

The nobleman of course represents Christ. Christ has gone into a far country “to receive a kingdom from his Father.” As king He will sit on the throne of David and reign forever. (Luke 1:32-33). During His absence His servants are to use the capital entrusted to them and to increase it by trading. Now in the parable when the nobleman returned, he called each of them to give an account of his stewardship. This speaks of the Judgment Seat of Christ, where every man shall give an account of his deeds to God.

The Faithful Given Positions of Authority

To understand this parable, let us consider what Christ has said elsewhere about the bestowal of positions of authority to those who are faithful stewards. In the case of the rich young ruler who turned sorrowfully away after Jesus had invited him to join the apostolic party, Peter ventured to ask what should be done for them who had left all. In reply, Jesus gave them a promise that during the Millennium the Twelve would, as their reward, sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel:

“And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28).

Not only will the apostles be given positions of authority, but Jesus also said that all overcomers will in that time share in the rulership of the nations:

“And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father” (Rev. 2:26-27).

Now in the parable we see a direct relation between the individual's accomplishments in this time in the Lord's service and the position the person will hold in the age to come.

The first servant to come before his lord could say, “Thy pound hath gained ten pounds.” The master then replied in words of praise, “Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities” (Luke 19:17). Here the thought of activity in the next age is made clear. It is obvious that the idea some have that the kingdom of God is more or less a place of idleness is far from true. Such a condition would give little satisfaction to the spirit of man. The truth is that the lessons we learn today will be of the utmost value to us in the world to come. The Millennium will be

an age of activity and progress toward perfection. Although “the spirits of just men” will be “made perfect,” there will be much to do in God’s kingdom during the Millennium, for it will not be the perfect age. Although open wickedness will be put down, there will still be some men whose hearts are set to do evil (Isa. 65:20; Zech. 14:17-19). These will have to be judged, and there will be the problems of governing the nations.

The Millennial age will call for individuals of high caliber, men devoted to the administration of justice. For this reason, the first qualification of a ruler is that he be an overcomer, that he is able to rule himself. The writer of Proverbs said, “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city” (Prov. 16:32).

The man who gained ten pounds represents that class of followers of Christ who receive the highest reward. He was faithful and active to the very limit of his ability and may be reckoned among the 100-fold believers. He will reign over a large province during the Millennium.

The second servant who was called forward to give an account of his stewardship said, “Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds.” This was a good man, though he did not attain unto the first. He was content with lesser achievements. He had not put the same zeal and sacrifice into his work as the first had done. Nevertheless, he had done well, and the Lord said to him, “Be thou also over five cities.” While he did not receive the same reward as the other, he received a reward in proportion to his efforts.

Although there were ten servants, only two are mentioned as receiving rewards. There were seven servants of whom no mention is made. But in each case the reward was in proportion to the service. Different degrees of industry require varying degrees of reward.

We can only speculate about the great work of the future ages. We know that the enlarged scope of our labors will mean a greatly increased capacity to work. Satan, our enemy, will be out of the way, and the terrible conflict with the evil powers will be

ended. The children of God will truly enter into the joy of the Lord.

Let us pause a moment to consider the man who had his pound wrapped up in a napkin. This indolent servant made no investment of his lord's money. To justify his idleness he said, "I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow."

This man appeared to be only a professor of Christianity. Thousands of such persons are church members only through fear. They have no proper conception of God and His justice. They are full of questions about why God does this or that. They are so dominated by fear that they are of no good to the cause of Christ. Indeed this man's conduct was so base that he is described as a wicked servant. What finally happened to him? He was stripped of all that he had, and it was given to him that had the ten pounds. The sentence passed was a solemn one. "For I say unto you, that unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him" (Luke 19:26).

The text does not indicate that this man was even "saved by fire," although we are told elsewhere that there is such a class of persons. Though saved, what remorseful thoughts they will have in eternity of missed opportunity. Their state and position is now fixed forever. There is no prospect for a slothful servant of a greater sphere of activity or of a greater joy in the future.

The Parable of the Talents

"For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey" (Matt. 25:14- 15).

The parable of the Talents may seem to have similarity to that of the Pounds. The similarity is only superficial, for there are many points of difference. In this one, the servants are given

talents; in the other they were given pounds. The pounds were worth only a few dollars, while the talents were worth thousands. In the first, each servant received a pound, while in the second each received talents according to his several abilities. In the first each was rewarded according to the number that his pound increased. In the second one they were rewarded on the basis of faithfulness.

Although the two parables have considerable differences between them, they actually supplement one another. Both teach important lessons concerning the Judgment Seat of Christ. The man in the Parable of the Talents of course represents Christ. He too went into a far country, which answers to heaven, where He is seated at the right hand of God.

Now before the lord left, he called his servants to him, giving unto one five talents, to another two talents, and to another one, to each according to his several abilities. The first with his five talents gained five more; the second with his two talents gained two more; while the third took his talent and buried it in the earth.

What do these talents represent? We know that after Christ returned to heaven, He received the Spirit from the Father and gave gifts unto men (Acts 2:33; Ephes. 4:7-8). The talents represent, therefore, gifts of ministry that Christ gave to His Church. It is important to understand that these talents have reference to supernatural impartation, rather than human abilities. Nevertheless, there is usually some relation between the gifts which one may be given and his natural abilities. The talents were given in proportion to "his several abilities." Although God gives His gifts to His humblest servants, individual capacity is involved in their reception. Sanctified human ability working in cooperation with the Spirit of God accomplishes the greatest good. If we do not develop what abilities and talents we have in this life, how shall we be able to take on added responsibilities in the world to come? And yet we cannot take pride in our abilities, for as the apostle Paul said, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (I Cor. 4:7).

Whether natural abilities, or those spiritual, all come from God.

The talents, therefore, can be represented by the gifts and the gift ministries, spoken of in I Corinthians 12. These operate proportionately according to the person's faith and the measure of grace bestowed (Romans 12:3). Gifts are given to the person in proportion to their natural capacities to receive.

So while the pounds were given equally to each one, the talents were given according to the man's ability. Each received a certain number of talents according as his natural capacities could best use. In any case the talents were not to be employed for personal enrichment, but for the benefit of the Master. The first two as wise stewards began to trade and invest the money, and it gradually increased that which the Master had put into their hands.

The time had come when the lord of the servants returned and reckoned with them:

“After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matt. 25:19-21).

Now we notice a difference between the Parable of the Pounds and of the Talents in the matter of rewards. He whose pound gained ten pounds was made ruler of ten cities, and he whose pound gained five was made ruler of five cities. In the case of the talents, the Lord spoke the same words to him who gained five as to him who gained two: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

In this parable Jesus taught another great truth. Men were not to be rewarded altogether on the basis of how much God gave them. They have nothing to boast of, because God may

have given one more than He has given another. The reward is in the degree of faithfulness. Equal faithfulness brings equal reward. Each will enter into the joy of the Lord.

The parable obviously seems to teach that each Christian, whether it be the mother in the home, the Sunday school teacher who is faithful at her post, the pastor who is faithful in his ministry, all will share alike in the Bridegroom's joy. The key word is faithfulness.

We see in the case of the man who received one talent, that he went out and hid it in the earth. The talent was hidden in earthly pleasures, earthly possessions, earthly ambitions. Alas, these often cover up talents that God has given.

Perhaps there is a person to whom God has given an excellent voice, but worldly ambitions attract his attention; and the talent is used for selfish purposes. Another is asked to teach a Sunday school class, or perhaps to work with the youth; but he decides that he is too busy to undertake the responsibility. Still another is called to the ministry, and though he might have become a great soulwinner, he decides the sacrifice is too great. So the talent is buried and accomplishes nothing for the Kingdom of God.

But as sure as tomorrow comes, there is a day of reckoning. What will the man who has buried his talent do? The evil servant defended himself by reflecting against his Lord's character:

“Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine” (Matt. 25:24-25).

Every man seeks to justify his faith. He excuses himself by saying he was afraid. The demon of fear took hold of him. How many people are afraid to take God at His word! They are afraid to use their talents for God.

That the man had only one talent was no excuse. The Lord

gave the same commendation to each one who was faithful. The test of faithfulness can be made equally well if one has few gifts or many. The Lord commended the widow who gave two mites saying, that “this poor widow hath cast in more than they all ... but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had” (Luke 21:3-4).

This parable shows the awful sin of neglect, of doing nothing. The time came when he must give an accounting. In trying to give an explanation he becomes irrational and incoherent. In his folly he takes the Lord to task when in reality he was the one on trial. Such a defense seems incredible, yet it is excuses like these that people give when they are asked why they are not using their talents for God.

Then came the verdict. The talent of the slothful servant was taken from him and given to him who had ten talents. It is a solemn thing to consider that this man never realized his danger until his gift was lost forever.

What happens to the unprofitable servant? It seems that this man is not even saved “by fire.” He not only loses his reward, but we are told that the order is given to “cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 25:30).

The Parable of the Talents reminds us of the words of the Lord, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away ... If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” (John 15:2, 6).

That these parables have direct reference to the Judgment Seat of Christ there can be no doubt. They carry a solemn message and are worthy of the most careful study by those who would stand before the Lord and hear the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

Chapter V

Pressing Forward to the Prize

In I Cor. 9:24 the apostle speaks about a special prize to be won. He says, “Know ye not that they which run a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain.” In Philippians 3:7-14 he elaborates on what that prize is:

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made comformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of (‘from among,’ margin) the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Here is a remarkable passage in which Paul speaks of a prize —*the winning of Christ*. This certainly does not refer to receiving Christ in salvation. For the apostle that had been settled long before. We do not labor to win Christ as Saviour. Throughout his writings Paul emphasizes that salvation is a free gift through Jesus Christ. Any attempt to obtain it by means of works is emphatically disallowed. This being true and incontrovertible, what then did Paul mean when he spoke about winning Christ? Let us look carefully at the text.

Notice that he is speaking about a prize to be won, one of such value that he counts all things loss if by any means he might win it. Clearly this is something different from receiving Christ in salvation. The language is altogether different from other statements in his epistle which refer to personal salvation. In writing to the Colossians he speaks of them as receiving Christ in the past tense. "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Col. 2:6). Paul is even more emphatic concerning his own experience. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). He enjoins the Galatians who have received Christ by faith not to go back to the Law with its works. We need not quote other Scriptures on this, since this truth of salvation by faith and not of works is the very basic fundamental of the Gospel.

But this leaves us with the intriguing question as to what Paul means by saying, "I have suffered the loss of all things ... *that I might win Christ* ... If by any means I might attain ... not as though I had already attained ..." etc. As we have said, he is not referring to personal salvation, but to something to be earned. It is something very special, a prize that is of such worth as to dwarf into insignificance any other thing of value in this world. Clearly the prize is the winning of Christ in some special way different from salvation.

The truth is that there are various relationships which Christ has with His people. He is king to Israel; He is Lord to the Church. John the Baptist said that He was a friend to the Bridegroom. The Lord speaks of some of His people as servants, although in one sense we are all His servants. Yet He promotes some to the status of friends. Abraham was "the Friend of God." John 15:14-15 refers to this higher relationship:

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

Christ is a Bridegroom; therefore, He must have a bride. Surely it is a great honor to share in any part of Christ's bridal party. "And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9). The foolish virgins of Matthew 25, alas, missed it. They failed to have oil in their vessels with their lamps. They failed to have the oil of the Spirit, and were not even in the bridal party, let alone the bride.

Back to Paul's words in Philippians. He speaks of a prize to be won. "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Verse 14). Obviously this prize will not be won by lukewarm Christians whose goal is like the words of the song, "If I Can Just Make It In." The prize is reserved for the overcomers, the hundredfold Christians. As Christ pointed out in His parable, there are hundredfold, sixtyfold, and thirtyfold disciples (Matt. 13).

To be in this coveted class—the inner circle—one must, as Paul, put forth a supreme effort. He must throw everything he has into the fray. It is not necessary that he possesses some special gift or talent, but he must give all he has, reminding us of the widow who gave two mites—all she had. Of course, this consecration includes much more than just our material gifts.

There will be an inner circle in Christ's coming kingdom, even as there was while He was on earth. First, there was the multitude who listened to His words and rejoiced in His miracles—but most of whom never understood the spiritual meaning of His teaching (John 6:24, 60, 66). Then there were 500 believers who followed Him the whole way and were counted worthy of witnessing Him in His resurrection glory (I Cor. 15:6). Of these there were 120 who were so devoted to Him that they obeyed His command to tarry in Jerusalem until they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5; 2:1-4). Among these 120 there was a smaller circle of seventy disciples who had gone forth in active ministry in the harvest field (Luke 10:1-2). A still more intimate group were His twelve apostles who had forsaken all to follow Him and whom He ordained to become special leaders of His

Church (Matt. 19:27-29). And then finally there was the innermost circle of all—Peter, James, and John. He took these three alone up on the Mt. of Transfiguration (Matthew 17). Another time He brought them into the room with Him when He raised the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:51). There were other such occasions. They were the innermost circle within the inner circle. And thus it will be in the world to come. Revelation 14:1-5 informs us that there will be a special company in heaven, limited in number, who will follow the Lamb “whithersoever he goeth.”

Returning to the words of Paul, it is clear that the qualifications of those who win the prize involve a full surrender, a full dedication, a full consecration. All that they possess, spiritually, mentally physically, and materially they devote to Christ. Not that God requires His people to take a poverty vow, for that would be contrary to Mark 10:29-30. But all that they have must be put at Christ’s disposal, ready to be expended at His command. Thus to win this prize did Paul count all things loss.

In this race there will be a sharing of the sufferings of Christ. Not sickness, nor disease, for Christ had none of these; and it would be an insult to His holiness and purity to imply that the Great Physician was subject to the diseases of Satan. Indeed, disease and sickness fled before Him (Acts 10:38). But there are sufferings. If one would get some idea of what Paul suffered, he should read II Corinthians 11:23-33. Most of Paul’s sufferings came as the result of persecutions from false brethren and the rigors of evangelism of that day. Conditions are somewhat different in the field today, but whether at home or abroad, those who will live godly will suffer persecution; they will have trials, they will have temptations. Jesus said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

We cannot leave this subject without noting a special dimension of faith whereby the believer takes dominion over many circumstances that might otherwise give him much grief

and pain. Job spoke of that place in Chapter 28:7: "There is a path which no fowl knoweth and which the vulture's eye hath not seen." Many Christians do not know of this. Only those who dwell in the secret place of the Most High (Psalms 91). Every believer should carefully study this chapter, for it speaks of the highest plateau of Christian experience, open only to those who have ears to hear. It is a place for those who have learned the advanced lessons of faith and have entered into that realm where they rise above many of the petty annoyances and problems of life, thus releasing them for greater advances and greater victories over the foe.

Alas, that it must be said that many workers in God's vineyard are slothful and negligent in their Christian calling. They are too casual in their whole way of life and are apt to resent any pressures that will disturb their comfortable routine. Others are too disorganized to win the race. They will never secure the prize that the apostle strove for, but lagging behind they will learn too late that a golden opportunity has been lost forever. They are saved, but "saved as by fire," or with diminished reward, and destined to spend eternity in the outer circle. So do men in this life determine their destiny.

The apostle wrote the Philippian letter late in his life, perhaps six or seven years before his death; yet he did not claim he had achieved his goal. He said, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before" (Phil. 3:13-14). He had not yet attained the prize, but forgetting the past, he pushed on toward the mark. There is no respite, no stopping place in this life, no retirement from this warfare, until the Master says, "It is enough. Come up hither."

But Paul did finally win the prize. As the shadow of the executioner fell across his path he could say:

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for

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me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing ... And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (II Tim. 4:6-8, 18).

Paul knew that his fight was finished; his work was done; the prize he had so coveted and longed for through those many years of suffering and toil was his. He could hardly wait for the moment of his departure to take place. “Absent from the body ... present with the Lord.” Surely an abundant entrance into the heavenly kingdom awaited him!

The prize then is the supreme joy of being a part of the inner circle, to be included in the very bride of Christ, to be close to Him as a wife to a husband for eternity. When Paul first saw Christ on the Damascus Road, it was love at first sight. He never lost that first love, but his devotion grew in intensity as the years went by. From that day on, the ruling passion of his life was that he might win Christ. And in the end he won. May God grant that we also enter into the race and pursue the goal until it is won.

Chapter VI

The Firstfruits Resurrection

There is something else of great significance in Paul's discussion of the prize which he so eagerly sought. He says,

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection ... If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead ... forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:10-14).

The above Scripture introduces a matter which at first sight seems to be a paradox. Paul is saying that he is putting forth every effort to attain unto a certain resurrection. What could he mean by this? Paul was a redeemed man, and we are straightly told that all the redeemed will participate in the first resurrection. What then was Paul seeking to attain? An examination of the Greek text gives us the answer. The original Greek reads, "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection *from among the dead*." This can mean none other than an out-resurrection. In other words, participation in this resurrection is part of the prize that Paul was seeking to obtain. His salvation and, therefore, his sharing in the general resurrection of the righteous had been long assured:

"For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (II Tim. 1:12).

Paul had not the slightest doubt about his salvation. But he was seeking something more—the privilege of being in the out-resurrection. For this prize he was willing to "suffer the loss of all things, and count them but dung, that I may win Christ ... that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection..." (Phil. 3:8,

10).

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“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29).

From the above verses it might at first sight be assumed that all the dead, both the righteous and the wicked, will be raised at the same time. Indeed some who have not been careful to examine all the Scriptures on this subject have taken that position. However, Revelation 20:5 makes it clear that one thousand years must elapse between the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. We must be careful, therefore, to distinguish between general statements about the resurrection and those Scriptures which are specific regarding the time element that is involved.

Because of the failure to compare Scripture with Scripture, there are those who hold that I Thessalonians 4:13-17 teaches that all the saved dead are resurrected at the same instant. But a comparison of this passage with other Scriptures shows that this is not the case. Indeed, we are specifically informed that the firstfruits of the Old Testament saints have already been resurrected! We are told that “many bodies of the saints which slept arose and came out of their graves after his resurrection...”

“And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many” (Matthew 27:51-53).

To say that *all* the righteous dead will be raised at the same instant is, therefore, clearly denied by the Scriptures. The firstfruits of the Old Testament saints have already risen! Notice

the particulars of the above passages:

1. “Many bodies of the saints which slept arose.” Not just a few bodies.
2. Yet it does not say, “all” of the bodies of the saints arose; therefore, it was a selective resurrection.
3. The term “bodies” is used, denoting that it was a physical resurrection, not just an appearance of spirits.
4. It was associated with Christ’s resurrection and had all the implications of His resurrection.
5. It was more than a raising of those who had just died, as was the case of the daughter of Jairus or the son of the widow of Nain. These “bodies” had been in graves and no doubt had largely been reduced to dust. This was a true resurrection.
6. These saints appeared “unto many.” They apparently had similar powers to those of the resurrected Christ. In His glorified body, He was able to “appear” at will, to pass through walls without restraint. So did these saints.
7. There is no record of these saints dying again. Indeed, as Jesus said of those resurrected, “Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels” (Luke 20:36).

Now if it be true that there was a firstfruits resurrection of Old Testament saints, certainly it would be fitting that there should be a firstfruits resurrection of New Testament saints. And so we can see the meaning and significance of Paul’s statement that he might attain unto “the resurrection from among the dead.”

It appears also from I Corinthians 15:22-23 that there is an order to the resurrection:

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming.”

The order is as follows:

1. Christ

2. The firstfruits
3. Afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming.

It may be objected that there is no comma or semicolon after Christ in the King James Version, and the punctuation implies that Christ is the firstfruits. We must point out, however, in this respect, that there are no commas or semicolons in the original Greek, and they have to be supplied by the translators. Christ is indeed the firstfruits but not all of the firstfruits. That there is a firstfruit company in the resurrection is clear from Revelations 14:1-5:

“And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Rev. 14:1-5).

Here we are told of 144,000 saints singing a new song before the throne of God. These are they that are “redeemed from among men” and are “without fault before the throne of God.” Notice that these firstfruits are not tribulation saints. They are in heaven *while the antichrist is still giving the mark of the beast on earth and making war with the saints*, clearly showing that the Great Tribulation is still on (Rev. 14:9-12).

Why should a company of firstfruits saints be raptured or resurrected before the Great Tribulation? Surely this can be considered as a reward, but not merely that they might escape tribulation. This misses the point altogether, for some of God's choicest saints have endured not only tribulation but martyrdom

for the cause of Christ.

It seems likely that the firstfruits saints will enter, shortly after their rapture (or resurrection), upon some very serious responsibilities. I Corinthians 6:2-3 declare that saints are appointed to judge angels, and Paul further implies that they must show themselves qualified for the task if they are to be worthy of that position:

“Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?”

Clearly, only the saints who have met the qualifications will participate in the judging of angels. They will also share in the task of executing judgment on the earth:

“Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; To execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints. Praise ye the Lord” (Psalm 149:5-9).

Other Scriptures confirm the truths expressed above. We are specifically informed that the overcoming saints will rule the nations with a rod of iron:

“And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father” (Rev. 2:26-27).

“And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne” (Rev. 12:5).

Notice that the Manchild Company or the overcomers who are to rule the nations with a rod of iron are caught up to the throne of God just before the Great Tribulation, which opens at

the beginning of Revelation 13. Christ as the head will reign, but He will have many under Him sharing in this task.

Apparently of most immediate importance, this company will participate in the displacement of Satan and his angels from the heavenlies. Michael and his angels fight, but they fight not alone. The saints participate in the war against the Dragon.

“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Rev. 12:7-11).

The description, “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony” refers not to angels but to saints. There is a great moral conflict in the contest of spiritual powers. It is a warfare that not all of God’s people understand. Paul spoke of it in Ephesians 6:12:

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

Only those saints skilled in intercessory prayer understand this language. Daniel knew the meaning of spiritual conflict when he wrestled 21 days against the prince of Persia (Daniel 10).

The saints who are in the firstfruits resurrection will have their work cut out for them. With Michael and his angels they will complete the task of displacing Satan from the heavenlies.

The firstfruits will sing the new song before the throne of

God, a song that none others may learn, and they always will “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.” That is the real prize—to be close to Christ forever! Such is the highest measure of delight, the utmost degree of man’s capacity for enjoyment. Something of this the psalmist was saying in the Spirit in Chapters 16 and 17 of Psalms:

“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11).

“As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake, with thy likeness” (Psalm 17:15).

And thus we begin to see what Paul meant when he said,

“I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ ... If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection (from among) the dead” (Phil. 3:8, 11).

